

Old Pension Building
Judiciary Square, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

HABS No. DC-76

HABS
DC
WASH
152-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington 25, D. C.

MULTIPLE
ADDENDUMS
FOLLOW

Old Pension Building
Judiciary Square, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

HABS No. DC-76

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Old Pension Building

Owner: U. S. Government

Date of Erection: 1883

Architect: General Montgomery C. Meigs

Present Use: By Civil Service Commission

Number of Stories: Basically a three story structure forming a hollow square, with an inner court roofed by a gabled clerestory above an outer roof.

Description: The Old Pension Building, built of red brick with elaborately moulded ornament, is said to have been inspired by the Farnese Palace in Rome. Perhaps its outstanding exterior feature is a three-foot high terracotta frieze which completely encircles the structure. Designed by C. Buberl, a Bohemian artist, this belt course portrays the infantry, cavalry, artillery, naval quartermaster's and medical forces of the Union in the Civil War. The Four Portals derive their designations from motifs above; thus the North Entrance is known as the Gate of the Invalids; the West Entrance, the Gate of the Quartermaster; the South Entrance, that of the Infantry and the East, the Naval Gate. Terra-cotta spandrels feature Mars and Minerva and Justice and Truth, symbolizing respectively War and Peace.

Immensity of the interior court is the building's most notable characteristic. The great hall rises to a height of 120 feet and covers an approximate floor space of over 100 by 300 feet. This area is dominated by mammoth Corinthian columns painted to resemble Sienna marble. Tiered

galleries surround the room, employing Doric columns at the lower level with Ionic ones above. Higher up an iron gallery hangs along the walls. Even today cluttered-up with files as this hall is, its loftiness and overhead space is an impressive sight.

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History: The Pension Building was erected in 1883 at a cost of \$900,000, as a memorial to the veterans of the Civil War. From 1885 until 1926 it was occupied by the Bureau of Pensions. The latter year the building was taken over by the General Accounting Office and used by that organization until completion of their new building. It is currently an annex to the Civil Service Commission.

The Old Pension Building has figured conspicuously in the annals of our inaugural balls. The central hall has been the scene of celebrations for Presidents Cleveland, Harrison, McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and Taft. At the last ball held here in 1909, newspapers reprinted that 18,000 persons attended.

Reference: W. P. A. Guide, Washington City and Capital, Government Printing Office, 1937.

Prepared by: Russell Jones and Worth Bailey, HABS, National Park Service,
March, 1959

Approved: _____

Dick Sutton
Chief Architect

Date 10/22/59

Addendum to
Pension Building
440 G Street, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-76

HABS
DC,
WASH,
152-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS
DC,
WASH.,
152-

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE District of Columbia	COUNTY	TOWN OR VICINITY Washington
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) ADDENDUM TO Pension Building		HABS NO. DC-76
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 440 G Street, NW		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE)		ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE)		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS)		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE)		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES By 1959, the lower part of the central court had been converted into offices. Court cleared and reopened to full size in the 1970's.		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE To be renovated as the National Building Museum. Condition fair to poor.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) Listed on National Register of Historic Places. Category I District of Columbia Landmark. Original measured drawings located at the National Archives.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Druscilla J. Null, HABS		DATE 6/23/83

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

ADDENDUM TO
PENSION BUILDING
(NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM)
440 G Street, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-76

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013

Addendum to
Pension Building
440 G Street, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Addendum To

Pension Building
440 G. Street, N. W.
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM
FOLIO 152

Addendum to
Pension Building (National Building Museum)
440 G Street Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-76

REDUCED COPY OF MEASURED DRAWING

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127